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Environmental Center

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SB 1930 RELATING TO THE ALA WAI CANAL

Senate Committee on Tourism and Recreation

Public Hearing - February 7, 1995
1:00 P.M., Room 305 SOT

By

John T. Harrison, Environmental Center
Hans Krock, Ocean Engineering
Jacquelin N. Miller, Environmental Center
Peter Rappa, Sea Grant

SB 1930 would appropriate funds for the plans, design, and preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Ala Wai Canal Improvement Project.

Our statement on this measure does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

We call the attention of the Legislature to the extensive record of recent (1990 to present) legislation, testimony, and committee reports which deal with the subject proposal of SB 1930. We also note the signed contract for engineering services prepared pursuant to Act 299, SLH 1990, dated June 17th, 1991 between the Board of Land and Natural Resources and Edward K. Noda & Associates, Inc. Prior legislative appropriation measures (HB 2245, 1990; SB 2416, 1990; HB 2104, 1990;) have specified the preparation and submittal of an EIS as part of the work to be performed with the appropriated funds. Specific references in the Standing Committee Reports (SCR 2109, 1990; SCR 115-90, 1990; SCR 2752, 1990) make it clear that it was the legislative intent that an EIS be prepared. The signed contract specifies in the Objective (Section 3.1 A.), the Scope of Work (Section 3.2 C.), and in the Submissions for Approvals (Section 4.13 B.) that an EIS to meet Federal and State requirements was to be prepared. Finally, it was the recommendation of the Ala Wai Technical Committee convened to review the proposed clean-up of the Ala Wai Canal that an EIS be prepared (Letter Report to the Division of Water and Land Development, DLNR, dated September 30, 1992). The explicit purpose of the emphasis on combining planning and design studies with

preparation of an EIS was to maximize the coordination of planning and environmental considerations while minimizing costs.

The present bill incorporates dredging of the canal into the Ala Wai Canal Improvement Project. Dredging of the canal and work undertaken to improve water circulation and flushing are two separate, mutually independent actions. As a depositional sedimentation basin, the canal needs to be dredged periodically to maintain the necessary flood flow capacity. Without dredging, flooding of adjacent low-lying properties is a potential problem. Circulation improvement through enhanced flow is directed towards improving the appearance of the canal in order to improve its recreational potential. The two actions are not dependent one on another.

In view of the extensive and intensive studies already completed on the canal, the need for further studies is not justified. What is needed is to package the existing information into an EIS in accordance with the previous contract, and funding already has been provided to the contractor to complete this work.

Preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to Chapter 343, HRS, should be undertaken using existing information which the State already has paid for. Very little, if any, additional field work is needed for this EA. The dredging is a purely maintenance operation, and the impacts were examined in detail for the EA/Negative Declaration prepared for the previous dredging in 1978. In addition, significant additional work on specific concerns related to chemical contamination of the canal sediments has been completed by researchers at the School of Ocean, Earth Sciences and Technology (SOEST), and is available for reference.

It should be noted that an EA/Negative Determination was prepared for the Ala Wai Canal Improvement Project in November of 1992. In our detailed review of the draft EA, we specifically drew attention to the need for an EIS, noting that the draft EA specifically invoked at least seven of the prescribed triggers under Section 11-200-12, HAR for determination of potential significance of impacts. Our comments were apparently disregarded.

In summary, based on studies already either funded by the legislature or conducted independently as funded research, sufficient information already exists and funding already has been provided to prepare the needed EIS. Funds for preparation of an EA for the dredging can be extremely modest, since DLNR already has been provided all of the required field information.